

Building a Healthy Community: A Grassroots Approach

In Maple Ridge, as in other local and global communities, a grass-roots movement is taking place – one designed to renew the health of our community; to re-introduce what in the early 1900's was the mainstay of every small community – a sense of connection, of place, and of shared experiences.

While the realities of community life have changed, the definition of what a healthy community is much the same as it was a century ago. A healthy community is a place where:

- Everyone has access to food, housing, health care, employment, and recreation;
- Individuals have opportunities for personal development – through education, volunteer, or self-directed activities;
- Residents have a sense of belonging and feel safe in their neighbourhood;
- Neighbourhood diversity is celebrated;
- Individuals and groups collaborate to achieve the greatest benefit for all;
- Local needs are central to the decisions made by community agencies.

Locally, this renewal can be seen in citizen lead activities – various Neighbourhood Associations, Farmer's Market, and Youth Movie Night – and in the processes that community agencies are implementing – OCP consultations, Smart Growth, or the Fraser Health community consultations.

These activities invite residents to consult on issues that directly relate to the quality of life they experience on their block, in their neighbourhood, and in the community as a whole. Quality of life issues such as working, learning, playing, engaging, living,

moving, and sense of place are being discussed, evaluated, and prioritized to define what is working and where improvements could be made.

Neighbours are talking to each other and learning that they share common interests, concerns, and often a common vision for what they want to see in their neighbourhoods. As commonalities are discussed, relationships are established, experiences are shared, and trust is built; key ingredients in a healthy and sustainable community.

One organization working towards strengthening the health and sustainability of Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and Katzie communities is Building Community Solutions. Established in 2001 and guided by a dedicated group of concerned citizens and representatives of community service agencies, Building Community Solutions engages residents in community building activities.

Building Community Solutions community activities have included:

- Compiling a Community Profile that evaluates community health based on a series of indicators;
- Facilitating Neighbourhood Circles to explore common themes;
- Coordinating a Conversation Café to explore community strengths and areas of improvement.

Ideas and feedback from participating residents have led to the establishment of the Haney Farmer's Market, Youth Movie Nights, and Neighbourhood Seed Grants – all designed to help residents get to know one another and share a common experience.

The healthy neighbourhoods and communities that our great-grand parents knew – where everyone knew one another and where everyone came together to celebrate and to overcome community challenges – are difficult to find in today's world. However, awareness is growing that when residents are engaged in their communities, when

common interests and values are recognized, when neighbours focus on community assets, the health and sustainability of the overall community is improved.

To learn more about how you can become involved in helping build a healthier community, contact the Building Community Solutions Coordinator at 604 467 7433 or by email at info@rmkstudycircles.ca. To learn more about Building Community Solutions, visit our website at www.rmkstudycircles.ca.